diplomatic Missions and Consular Posts in foreign countries as on 1st April, 2003 is 161.

(b) The number of Indian diplomatic Missions which consists of the Head of Missions, supported by one Attache with diplomatic status, and a few non-diplomatic staff with their place of location is nil.

(c) The names of countries where India has resident Missions but which do not maintain resident Missions in India are Azerbaijan, Botswana, Cote D' Ivorie (Ivory Coast), Fiji, Guyana, Jamaica, Madagascar, Maldives, Papua New Guinea and Seychelles. The names of countries which have resident Missions in India but where does not maintain resident Missions are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Congo (Democratic Republic), Holy See, Luxemburg, Rwanda, Solvenia, Somalia and Uruguay.

(d) to (e) The Expenditure Reforms Commissions in its report on the Ministry of External Affairs suggested that seven Missions namely Gaborone (Botswana), Ougadougou (Burkina Faso), Kingston (Jamaica), Velletta (Malta), Papua New Guinea (Port Moresby), Mahe (Seychelles) and Lima (Peru) could be considered for closure.

Two Indian resident Missions in Malta and Burkina Faso have since been closed down. There are no immediate proposals for closure of the remaining five Indian Missions abroad. However, the Ministry continues its efforts to constantly review functioning of its Missions/ Posts, and their continued relevance, and takes appropriate steps keeping in mind the political and economic ramifications of such decisions.

Inter-continental railway network

1036. SHRI LALIT SURI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to refer to the answer to Starred Question 263 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 7th August, 2003 and state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Prime Minister during his visit to Turkey and other European countries in September last made suggestion for having inter-continental railway networks connecting Southern China to London;

(b) if so, the names of the countries which have shown interests in

the venture and whether any concrete shape has been given to the proposal; and

(c) if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Questions do not arise.

Sino-Indian relations

1037. SHRI DINA NATH MISHRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) how far Sino-Indian relations have improved after Prime Minister's visit to China few months back;

(b) whether bi-lateral trade between the two countries has considerably increased after this visit;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether the balance of trade is favourable to India; and

(e) if so, the value thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) During Prime Minister's visit to China in June, 2003, both leaders signed a Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation, which lays down a blueprint for development of India-China relations. Provisions of the Declaration are being implemented. The Special Representatives on the boundary question held their first meeting in New Delhi on October, 23-24, 2003. Bi-lateral cooperation in diverse areas, including economic and commercial, has increased. Both sides have also continued the process of high-level exchanges. Among other exchanges, Mr. Jia Qinglin, Chairman of National Committee of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference paid an official visit to India from 23 to 27 November, 2003.

(b) to (e) As per China's Customs Statistics, in January-September, 2003, India-China bi-lateral trade increased by over 50% to reach US$ 5,330 million. While Indian exports increased by about 85% to reach US$ 2,957 million, Indian imports increased by about 28% to reach US$ 2,373 million. The trade balance of over US$ 500 million was thus in India's favour.